

Thoughts on Our Independence and Subsequent Events

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Two and a half millennia ago, the world that men talked about was much smaller than today. The Indians spoke of the island of the Rose Apple tree or Jambudvipa. The world of Confucius in China was surrounded by the Four Seas. So he said with confidence that 'All within the Four Seas are brothers.' They never had even dreamt of the communication highway of today and the ill-effects that would come in its wake. But whether you and I like it or not, our children are to inherit all the evils of scientific and technological advances of the world. They come to mankind like the atomic blasts of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

We are persuaded, pressurized and even cajoled at times into believing, by those above us and those around us, that we should be like the developed nations elsewhere, east or west. It is indeed a myth that they should be our models and that we should emulate them. Do we have with us any reasonably good yardsticks with which to measure their standards of development? The so-called developed countries are not without their degradations and their depravities. We are compelled to accept and are required to believe whatever comes down the pipeline, from the higher to the lower, merely because it is from the more affluent and the more technically advanced, power bloc groups to whom we are apparently indebted, even though, and everybody knows it, it may all end up in a total moral and spiritual annihilation.

Today we speak to you with an awareness that we are on the eve of celebrating fifty years of independence in Sri Lanka. You should also remember that we are very near winding up the notorious old century, the twentieth. During this period we have hit the headlines, not only in our achievements but also in our degradations. This is true of the whole world. We have on record many things

we humans have done in many parts of the world, here and elsewhere, in democracies and in socialist states, in high elite societies and less elite ones, from rulers at the top down to the commoners in the streets, which we could not believe that humans would ever stoop so low to do.

In this bewildering and confused state of affairs, let us Sri Lankans be a great deal more careful as to whose counsel or dictates we follow in putting right our problems, social, religious or political. Right now we seem to be in the middle of it. These new ideas, often slavishly imported from elsewhere, harvested and gathered by people on their invited brief visits abroad, may very well suit the centuries old stratified thinking of those countries or their new revisionist and compromising approaches which they adopt for their own present day gains. Believe me they benefit us not a bit. Calculated or otherwise, they corrode our well established life styles and eat into what we are trying to establish as our own. This is what contributes very often, at world level, to the conflict between the east and the west.

That great day of 4th of February 1948 on which we believe we gained independence, is as fresh in our minds as it were only the other day. We do remember the pomp and the pageant with which the rulership of this country changed hands, from the empire builders to the natives. Sri Lanka was declared an independent country. Now it seems, judging by what has happened ever since, that nobody ever had a vision as to what this country was going to be, nationally or internationally. What we are today is more than adequate proof of it.

We wish that those who handled the transfer at that time had before them a blue print for a liberated Sri Lanka with communal harmony and a unity of purpose. The target should have been an independent Sri Lanka for Sri Lankans, and I repeat Sri Lankans, i.e. the people of this island country, with our majorities and our minorities mutually respecting one another. Ethnic variations were never a problem with us to begin with. There should have been no secret plans with any one to alter or to reverse them and to embitter the peaceful communal relationships which existed.

As I speak to you today, what can I tell you to give you a little more sense and sanity in this crisis hour. We are like Macbeth wading deep in blood. The smaller communities are imagining the larger and the larger imagining the smaller to be demonic giants. Like a wild forest fire, this is being fanned on all sides, by interested parties, internally and externally. It is not being realised, that even with the support of international alliances, it is those within who would be reduced to ashes. The error of judgement lies on everybody's hands, both those who lead and those who are led, often led by the nose. Friends are made to appear enemies and vice versa, the important thing for everybody being winning in the end, even by sheer brute force. Please, please I tell you, let us stop these absurdies.